Chapter 3
E–Technologies in Higher Education Provision: Planning, Implementation and Management

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ABSTRACT
Technology is always advancing; furthermore, the economy and demographics, both at global and local levels dictate changes that businesses need to consider for future planning. Like all businesses, most academic institutions need to follow trends and offer new and up-to-date learning initiatives. This chapter discusses the assessment and evaluation of Web-based postgraduate and undergraduate programmes, at the Business School of a London-based university. The study reviews relevant literature, investigates student and staff views on the use of technology in learning, and reflects on the planning and management of two Supported Open Learning (SOL) programmes. It also offers suggestions for future programmes and courses designed for use with e-learning technologies.

INTRODUCTION
As the world around us changes so does the teaching profession. The use of electronic gateways to access up-to-date information and news, to effectively communicate and even socialise in virtual networks is increasing with every new product and application that reaches the market. Staff abilities and student learning preferences are never constant. Academic institutions and educators, in order to survive in the academic business, need to continue to facilitate effective learning. While most – if not all – learning institutions are focused on face-to-face instruction, e-learning initiatives in academia have been increasing. Course curriculum often incorporates online media resources that students can access through university or personal equipment, allowing learning to take...
place at a distance or generally in different ways than traditional teaching environments.

This London based university has entered the digital era of knowledge dissemination, for a number of years now, but mainly targeted existing programmes of study. Design for learning not only becomes a way to re-engage teachers in the debate about effective learning, but a means to reconsider the boundaries between knowledge and power, the relationship between the teacher and the learner, who controls the technologies and the curricula and learning (Walker & Ryan, 2008). Part of the wider development towards the facilitation of e-learning through new technologies was the creation of Supported Open Learning (SOL) versions for both postgraduate and undergraduate programmes, at the Business School. There cannot be a universal or standardised approach to e-learning provision because of the diversity of subjects being taught, as well as the multitude of available platforms and equipment and the local contextual factors. There was, therefore, a need to plan, develop, implement and manage these programmes with the School’s specific context in mind. Such processes often require a balance of pedagogic, technical and administrative concerns. Even when both technology and pedagogy are well supported, there may be structural problems that inhibit engagement with e-learning (Oliver & Dempster, 2003). The teaching technique is also another issue that relies manifestly on the individual educators’ backgrounds, training and style as well as the ability to engage with the changing technologies. Wider factors affecting the decisions for development of e-learning programmes and the capability of the institution to provide support are also considered.

The use of technology aimed to provide alternative solutions to the delivery of learning material, standardisation of assignment submission processes and effective management of large courses, in attending mode settings. The direction for the use of technology was recently focused towards the development of Distance Learning (DL) programmes and use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), and Course Management Systems (CMS). The development of e-learning does, however, have significant current and future resource implications in terms of managing VLEs and their integration with other Information Technology (IT) environments. The Business School, as identified in its strategic plan, working with administrative central departments and offices identified such implications as:

1. Delivery of a growing number of blended and online courses that are offered within the local geographic boundaries and across borders in varying academic calendars;
2. Implementation of new plagiarism procedures with anti-plagiarism software and supported integration into the Student Information System;
3. Coordination of VLE electronic coursework submission process and coursework marking with seamless integration into the Student Information System;
4. Improvement of business processes that support the School’s work with students:
   a. Timetabling of full-time, part-time, flexible and short courses (with appropriate levels of technology functionality).
   b. Batch course creation processing that facilitates automatic course rollovers with instructional content available immediately – instead of any manual copying.
   c. Batch load of students into VLE courses that contain unique identifiers for different tutorials.
5. Incorporating electronic portfolios into Personal and Professional Development courses (Year 1, 2 and 3) and new employability courses.

This willingness to work collaboratively to identify the e-business challenges that would